

Clem McGregor

Good morning. Today is Thursday, March 20, 2014. My name is James Crabtree, and this morning I'm interviewing Mr. Clem McGregor. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. This morning, we are at the Castle Hills First Baptist Church in Castle Hills, Texas, a suburb of San Antonio. Sir, thank you very much, and ma'am, thank you as well for doing this interview today. It's an honor for me and for our program. The first question that we always like to start with in these interviews is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the military.

Clem McGregor: Well, I was born near Gainesville, Texas, in 1916. July the 10th. My dad was a farmer and moved from one place to another. He had moved on several different farms. We moved across the county and that was a big move then. From one side of the county to the other. 'Course we had to move in a covered wagon.

Wow.

Clem McGregor: So we didn't know hardly what an automobile was then. Well, we did see one occasionally. Then we left, after we'd moved over there across the county, for several years and did farming. My dad was a farmer. Then we left there in 1927 and went to Vernon on another farm. And stayed on that farm several years and then we moved on three different farms there. My dad was renting and so on. So I wound up changing schools about twice, three times, in that period of time, and wound up at Vernon High School where I graduated in 1936. I was a little late graduating because I had to drop out of school one year. My dad was sick and couldn't finish the school. But I went back and finished high school. From there on I stayed there for a few years and eventually I met my wife. We were married in January 1942. Then I went into the military right after that and began to train. So wherever I went she went with me 'til we left.

When you were growing up on the farm did you have any brothers and sisters?

Clem McGregor: Yes, I had two brothers and two sisters. They were older than I. I was the youngest. The five and my oldest sister was 10 years older than I and it was two years difference in all the ages 'til it got down to me. I guess there was one missing so there was a four-year gap. They could order me around a little bit better.

So you were the baby of the family?

Clem McGregor: I was the baby in the family. That was quite a different thing from my wife. She wasn't the baby in her family. She had to help raise her . . . Several children after her.

How did you and your wife meet?

Clem McGregor: We met on the dance floor. I was going out to dancing then and my wife wanted to meet me or somebody else told her about me. You want her to put in a little bit there?

Sure. And Mrs. McGregor is here with us, so ma'am, if you want to share your memories . . .

Mrs. McGregor: I learned to dance at a girls club and, of course, eventually, you know, I guess you think, "Oh, it would be neat to go to a club." I don't think my folks knew anything about it,

but I did have a date, and by the way, it was a young man that knew my husband as well. From the same part of the country, outside of Vernon. I lived in Vernon. Oh, my date was absolutely stepping all over my feet. This mutual friend of ours was there. A young woman. She said, "Oh, Elsie, this guy is here that I know that is a wonderful dancer. You would love to dance with him." I said, "Well, why don't you introduce us?" And so she did and, well, he just swept me right off of my feet. I guess that tells the rest of the story.

Was this in 1941?

Mrs. McGregor: Yes.

Clem McGregor: Yeah, we met in 1941.

In '41.

Mrs. McGregor: In September. So we had not known each other that long but I felt like I knew him well enough.

Because on December 7th, of '41, is Pearl Harbor Day, when the war started. Do you remember where you were that day when you learned Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

Clem McGregor: We went to a movie that night.

Mrs. McGregor: We had a date and we went to see Sergeant York. And that probably was the night we began to realize that we thought we felt pretty serious about one another. And so it just automatically . . . The whole thing then sped up very quickly. We were married on January 28th the very next year.

So, at that point, you thought there was a good likelihood that you'd be going off to war even though you weren't yet in the military?

Clem McGregor: I was sure I was going. Already. Of course, making preparations for that too and expecting to go. I was going to be drafted and the day that I got on the bus to go to the induction, the county agent who was responsible for filling the quota came and stuck his head in the door and called my name and said, "You can get off if you want to. You don't have to go until the next month. I've got my quota without you." He was interested in making his quota each month. So I said, "Oh no, I don't want to go through that waiting period again. I'm not going to get off." But in that month's time there was a call put out in Washington. "Don't take anymore farm boys because we need them on the farm." So had I got off the bus that day I would have had that decision to make. Whether I would go into the Army or I would have had a choice of staying on the farm. Which I'm glad I didn't make the choice, now that it's over. But I know that experiences were great even though I would have liked to have been home with my wife. But we had a good time together as we had our first meetings together. Financially, we were not good. We didn't have any money hardly. I think I had to borrow two dollars to buy the license to get married.

Were you all living on a farm at that point?

Mrs. McGregor: He was.

Clem McGregor: We were living on a farm with my dad and mother. They were in not too good health but good enough to stay up on their feet. But I was really taking care of doing all the farming and all that work.

What about your older brothers? Did either of them think about going into the service?

Clem McGregor: Well, I had two older brothers and they had already left. One of them was married and the other one didn't get married until after that.

They were too old to be drafted?

Clem McGregor: No, my second brother was in the Army. In the Air Force.

Army Air Corps?

Clem McGregor: Yeah. Yeah. But he was in the Air Force before I went in. He was in the South African Invasion when they were doing that. Before 19 and . . . It might have been in '41 but it could have been.

The early '40s, '42 or '43. How did your family feel about you going into the service? Were they supportive of you going off?

Clem McGregor: Oh yeah. Everybody was supportive then. The whole . . . I think we were together. Everybody you could see knew that this was a thing that we were together in. Not like it is today. From start to finish, I think, we were together in it.

So when you finally went away, where did you go to first? You mentioned getting on that bus. Where did that bus take you to?

Clem McGregor: To over in Oklahoma.

Mrs. McGregor: Fort Sill?

Clem McGregor: Fort Sill, Oklahoma. We had some training there. Not very much but we were learning how to do our turnaround, you know, when they'd say, "Attention."

Teach you how to march and that sort of thing?

Clem McGregor: Yeah, and there was somebody new coming in every day as they were drafting people. So I had to go through that every day.

So it wasn't really a boot camp then, it was just kind of a processing place?

Clem McGregor: Yes, right. Then soon as we got . . . I don't know how long we were there. Do you remember? Was it two weeks?

Mrs. McGregor: About six weeks.

Six weeks. Okay.

Clem McGregor: Anyway, we moved from there to Camp Barkeley. That's when our real training began to materialize. Our footwork, saluting, and all of the things that had to go with the training of a soldier.

Where was Camp Barkeley located?

Clem McGregor: At Abilene, Texas.

Abilene. Okay.

Clem McGregor: A little to the west of Abilene.

Sure. Tell us, sir, what a lot of the men were like when you were in boot camp with. Were they from around Texas? Were they from all over the country?

Clem McGregor: They were from all over the United States. The First World War was the 90th Infantry. This was the 90th Infantry being re-formed. The first 90th that was in World War I was made up of Texas and Oklahoma. That's where the T-O on my cap came from. Texas and Oklahoma. When they began to take people in from all over the United States they had to change that so they changed it to "Tough Hombre." Stayed with the T-O but . . . So whether we were that tough or not . . . I guess we did wind up being pretty tough when we got in the military service.

Mrs. McGregor: That's where the Southerners and the Yankees began to get acquainted with one another.

Sure. So at that point you knew you were going to be in the infantry, correct?

Clem McGregor: In the 90th Infantry Division. I didn't know for sure 'til we got to Camp Barkeley that I was going to be in the field artillery section. After we got into that we began to decide where we would be after our training.

So after you finished your basic training, did you go back to Fort Sill then to learn artillery?

Clem McGregor: No, we never did go back to Fort Sill. We had training in Louisiana for two months. Had some swamp training. We thought that might mean we were going to be in swampland somewhere. Then we went from there to California on the desert. So I had, I guess, a couple of months of training in the desert. Then from California we went to Fort Dix. We didn't know where we were going 'til the orders came out that day saying we were headed for Fort Dix. We were sure we were going to go to Europe.

What type of artillery did you use?

Clem McGregor: It was 105 Howitzers. There were three battalions of Howitzers and there was one of 155 Howitzers. So there was four battalions of artillery. I was in the 344th. Then I was in the headquarters section of that division and I wound up in the communications department.

Okay. So you weren't out there pulling the lanyards and lugging the rounds around.

Clem McGregor: No. Had to train a few things to do. A little bit around the guns but not a great deal. I didn't even have to stand around while they were firing, to speak of.

Now with the COM, were you working on the radios then or running the lines from one gun position to another?

Clem McGregor: Yeah. We began to have training in radio. In fact, I took training in . . .

Mrs. McGregor: S-O-S.

Morse Code?

Mrs. McGregor: Morse Code.

Clem McGregor: Yeah. Morse Code. Never did use it in combat but we didn't know that we weren't going to use it. I had to spend hours and hours just going through it. I began to learn how to use the radios that we were using. We were going to be shortwave radios. Learned how to change frequencies. We were told when we got in combat that we might have to change frequencies. Which we did. A lot.

That's right. How do you think it was that you came to be a radio operator? Because usually those people are picked because they have some sort of aptitude. Did they give you a test and figure out that you'd do well working with the radios?

Clem McGregor: I really don't know why. I feel like, now as I look back on it, that all this time, God was training me at the same time to do something different. I was getting ready for it. I felt a little bit like, then, the Lord was working in my life, but not like I do now, of course.

Sure. So when you get to Fort Dix, you know at that point you're getting ready to go to Europe, correct?

Clem McGregor: Yes.

What was that like when you finally departed? When you finally went overseas?

Clem McGregor: Well, let me go back just a minute here. As we left the desert on a train going to Fort Dix, our first son was born.

Okay.

Clem McGregor: While I was on that route. I figured I was somewhere about Abilene for the time he was born. I didn't know for sure. Got to Fort Dix and there was an emergency call there for me that my son had been born. I went to the commanding officer and he said, "All right, half the division's going to take furloughs and the other half when you get back. So you take the first half and go right now. Make your trip to Texas." So I did.

That's great.

Clem McGregor: So I had a few days, about maybe five or six days.

Mrs. McGregor: I think it was eight days.

Clem McGregor: Eight days, okay. Then we had to go back. When I got back to Fort Dix, I looked for a place to live, and I couldn't find a place for my wife to come to. She had been wherever I'd go. She'd be there.

Sure.

Clem McGregor: So that day, I looked all day long. I couldn't even find a crevice. And I called her and told her she better not come to Fort Dix because I couldn't find a place to live. The next day I had a call saying she was on her way.

Mrs. McGregor: I think that they were on the desert in Nevada and California for three months and I lived with his parents there in a suburb of Arlington, Texas. They had bought a home there. So we had not been together in months before our son was born. By the way, he would have turned 70 on January the fifth of this year. We were married 72 years on January the 28th.

That's great.

Mrs. McGregor: But he lost his life in an automobile accident.

Sorry to hear that.

Mrs. McGregor: After he was married and one child of his own. He lost his life. But he was a Christian so we know we'll see him again one day. So that's why I was determined that I try to see him one more time. He was telling me, "Don't come. There aren't any . . . Every wife, every military man is here if she can find a cubbyhole. There isn't any place." Then he went to the club. What kind of club was it where you went? Where they entertain the military, you know. A coffee . . .

USO club maybe?

Clem McGregor and Mrs. McGregor: USO.

Mrs. McGregor: I couldn't remember it either. And I don't know why because we went all the time in Abilene. And they'd dance there also. So he went there and met this lovely lady that was a hostess there at the Frasier. Lived in the suburbs of Trenton, right?

Clem McGregor: Yes.

Mrs. McGregor: And he told her his plight. And he had looked in vain and she said, "Well, you know, we have this little . . . It isn't even a guest room but it is more like a reading room and we have a . . . Would you believe this? Less than a half bed in that room. But if you can't find any place, maybe you could come and stay. Maybe you could find something even after she gets here." Of course, I didn't know any of that. I didn't know what was going to happen when I got there. Neither did I know what I looked like because they had pulled trains out for troop trains that had not . . . I don't know how long they'd been stored. But they had not been in use. So I was smoked up . . . A cashmere coat that I had . . . I should have known like that, looking at that, how bad I looked. Of course, the only people on that train were military people and I was scared to death. I really was. I thought . . . Now they had told me when I had to change trains in Saint Louis . . . And he had told me too. I forget how many tracks I had to cross over to get to the train I wanted to take on to Fort Dix, on to Trenton. And he said, "You will have to run." And of

course, I have one big piece of luggage. He said, "Maybe you can get someone to help you." Well, I thought, "Who would I trust?" You know, I'm just . . . You're talking about . . . I was almost a country girl like he was. And I thought, "I'll just pick one of the ugliest men on this coach." And in my mind I thought, "I can probably trust him." And I told him, they'd already noticed, and they knew what the score was, you know. And I was trying to get there to see my husband before he departed.

Did you have your baby with you too?

Mrs. McGregor: No, I left him in good hands.

That's good.

Mrs. McGregor: Clem's mother and dad and two sisters and their husbands and they all were going to take care of him.

That's good. Yeah.

Mrs. McGregor: He was in good hands. Of course, you know, it was hard. So we did go out to their house and finally, finally, he found a tiny little hotel room where we could just be by ourselves. And I spent the last money I had paying for that. I had no money to eat a bite of food all the way home. But it didn't matter. I didn't even . . . It was better to be with friends.

Sure.

Mrs. McGregor: But those of some of the experiences that the war brides had.

I'm sure that was a common occurrence at that point. So how long, sir, did you end up spending at Fort Dix before you shipped off?

Clem McGregor: I'm not sure.

Mrs. McGregor: About three months, something like that.

Clem McGregor: How much?

Mrs. McGregor: About three months.

Clem McGregor: Three months? We didn't really do any training there to speak of. It was just letting people get off to have their furloughs.

Sure.

Clem McGregor: That sort of thing. In fact, I can't remember we doing any training in there at all. If we did, I forgot what it was.

So once everyone was ready, you took a transport ship across the Atlantic?

Clem McGregor: Yes.

Tell us, sir, what you remember about that.

Clem McGregor: Well, it was an exciting trip to me because I'd never been on one. It didn't seem to bother me any. Lot of people that then would get sick from . . . Seasick, you know? I didn't have that problem. We made it to England, to Liverpool.

Okay.

Clem McGregor: Where we stayed, oh, must have been a couple of months. Something like that. Anyway, it was sometime in January when we started over there, and so we were getting ready for the invasion. And then we went down into Wales and had a training session, and some field artillery and everything. Everybody was training for the invasion, and we were expecting to get on board a ship. The day we got on it to go out, we thought we would have a dry run. Everything we had done before then had been dry runs, you know, like training with . . . I didn't stress on that but I slaved for, seemed like, three weeks on the ground firing rifles without any ammunition, training. And I had never fired a rifle. So the day that we become ready to fire for the record and have live ammunition, I was on guard duty that day. I wasn't out there training that day but I went out about 4 o'clock and started doing my firing, five different positions. And the first 30 rounds I fired, I had bull's eyes, and I'd never fired a rifle. And so the officers were excited about it, and they evidently had some bets going between them about who would be the winner, you know. So that day I told the officer I'd like to fire all of 'em, and he said, "I want you to wait 'til in the morning to finish your firing." So I did, and then I fired a couple of rounds, missed one bull's eye but it was good. I made sharpshooter.

It's hard to believe, sir, that you never fired a rifle growing up o a farm.

Clem McGregor: Never did fire a rifle. We've had other guns but we didn't do much firing of anything. It seemed like we was already working. So, that was something that was important, you know, to know, that I made that as a sharpshooter and I was glad. But I took the training diligently of how to hold the rifle and all of that which was very important.

Absolutely. While you were there in England, were you able to send letters back to your wife and family in the States?

Clem McGregor: Yes, I did. She always complained to me because I didn't write very much.

Mrs. McGregor: They were. It was V-mail.

Sure, they shrunk it down, right?

Clem McGregor: Yeah. V-mail just fit my . . .

Mrs. McGregor: We had . . . His mother and I . . . I lived with his folks, and my folks were nearby. And we just enjoyed just reading between . . . We had to read between the lines.

Sure.

Mrs. McGregor: Because it was the same thing every time. He's not too much of a detail person.

Well, I know there were certain details you couldn't write about obviously.

Mrs. McGregor: But the Fort Worth Star-Telegram told a lot. There was always a lot of write-up in that paper about what was going on. So that helped us to read between the lines.

Sure. So, sir, tell us then, when did you finally leave England? Where did you go when you departed?

Clem McGregor: We got onboard that ship thinking we were gonna make a dry run, hit the coast of England like we were making invasion, and about the second day out, we got word then from the loudspeaker that said, "This is not a dry run. This is the invasion we're making." And so we knew then that we were headed for France, and we did. We went across there on probably the fourth or fifth, something like that.

Of June?

Clem McGregor: We were out there in the ocean anyway. All of us were, ready to hit that coast. And on D-Day, we were somewhere out there. I don't know where, just out in the water is all I can remember.

Were there ships as far as the eye could see? Could you see lots and lots of ships from where you were?

Clem McGregor: Yeah, everywhere we'd look it seemed like there was a ship, and had to be a lot of 'em to carry that many, the whole 90th Infantry Division. 'Course others . . . I don't know how many others were helping out with that invasion now.

What were your thoughts at that point? Do you remember if you were afraid? If you were excited? What you were thinking knowing that . . .?

Clem McGregor: Well, I was excited but I wasn't . . . I never did feel any deep fear like a lot of guys did. I know some were so excited about it that they couldn't hardly stand it but I guess because I already had been looking to the Lord somewhat, not like I should have been, but I was.

So it gave you some peace then?

Clem McGregor: Yes.

Sure.

Mrs. McGregor: But you did have one scary time. Maybe that would be interesting.

Clem McGregor: Yes, the day that we were getting ready to hit the land, we'd already embarked from the big ship unto the small one that would take us on to the ground. We had waterproofed all of our vehicles. We'd spent hours and hours doing that so it would run underwater. So when our weapons carrier that was loaded with equipment came off the ramp and into the water, and we'd been told . . . The driver had been told to keep the motor revved up a lot when you hit that cold water because it will die underwater, and if you do, you can't start it and you'll have to be pulled out. So that day, sure enough, he didn't get it revved up enough and it died underwater. Well, I guess I sent up my first SOS to the Lord that day. "Lord, we need to get outta here." And sure enough, that fellow got his foot on that starter and he had to practically get under the water to get his foot on it, and we were that deep in it. But he got it started and we

pulled out. And it was one of those thrilling times. That wasn't all the time. It was a lot of 'em after that.

Did you land on one of the beaches there?

Clem McGregor: Yeah, at Utah Beach. You hear about that. They'll be a lot in this book about Utah Beach and the landing. There was two beaches that we landed on, the Utah and the Omaha Beach. So when we got on the land that night, well, about the third night, we were camouflaged and we had a machine gunner in our unit but he had been told not to fire if a plane came over at night. But I guess he thought he'd become a hero and knock that plane out, and he fired and that just let the fellow know exactly where we were so he dropped his load of bombs right in the middle of that camp. But it so happened that it hit in a . . . In an open section of that place where there wasn't any trees, and sand and just boomed up and went everywhere. You know, dust from it, and somebody hollered "Gas." We thought . . . We were expecting Germans to use gas. And, of course, everybody went for their gas mask. We'd been taught how to clear one, you know, and how to clamp on the hose so water wouldn't get in it if we went underwater, and the canister had tape over the end of it.

Okay.

Clem McGregor: Well, we were supposed to, when we got on land, to take that off but I forgot, like I do now, and I hadn't took the tape off or the clamp off my hose.

So you couldn't breathe, right?

Clem McGregor: So by the time I got that off, I had to breathe. In a few minutes I could holler and say, "It's not gas." I knew it wasn't gas by then.

You're lucky at that point that it wasn't.

Clem McGregor: Yeah.

What were the officers like in your unit when you made that landing? Did any of them stand out to you, your leaders?

Clem McGregor: Generally, we had real good officers but I remember one that was real hard to deal with, and he kept giving us trouble all the time we thought. And even after we got into combat, and he was still doing that. So the officers kinda teamed up in a way to get rid of him I guess, so . . .

So he was just dangerous or incompetent I guess in that sense. They needed to get him out of there.

Clem McGregor: Yeah, and I don't remember this name and I guess I don't need to.

Sure.

Mrs. McGregor: But you were especially close to Colonel Munson?

Who was Colonel Munson?

Clem McGregor: He was . . .

Mrs. McGregor: I think his son lives right here in San Antonio.

Clem McGregor: He was the . . . I guess he was over all of the field artillery, I believe. I think that's all his business. Might just have been the 344th that he was . . . I don't know how the divisions were. I believe it was 344th. I think they had a colonel over each section.

Once you landed there at Normandy, tell us how things moved from there. Did things seem to go pretty quickly to you, or did it seem like you were there forever?

Clem McGregor: Well, no, it seemed like a long time. It wasn't as long as it appears in the book, in here, but it seemed like a long time to us. I had to spend a lot of time just working on radios. In fact, I guess I spent hour after hour from there on just working like that, and I didn't have to get out. After we got in, were firing the artillery, we had to send a man out, a reconnaissance man, out to the front line every day. And I wanted to go but my commanding officer wouldn't let me go so I had to send someone else there to do that. So every day we were doing that, just observing what was going on.

Do you think you had a better idea of what was occurring because you were a radio operator than the average soldier would have? It seems like you would have been hearing things on the radio that would have let you know kind of what was taking place.

Clem McGregor: Well, just some. See, we were using the radio just for the firing.

Okay, for the fire missions?

Clem McGregor: Yeah, so we wouldn't be hearing what was going on in the other sections.

Okay. I didn't know if you had an idea of kind of the big picture because of that.

Clem McGregor: No, it didn't give us a picture of all of it. Of course, we were being informed of where they were, and the German 7th Army was the one that we were up against, and had Hitler decided for sure where the invasion was going to be, he probably would have drove us back into the sea because he would have been prepared for it, but he thought that was a decoy and that we were going to have a . . . The real landing was gonna be somewhere else, and so he prepared somewhere else for the big landing and missed the idea. And overall, I can look back on it now and see God was doing the maneuvering for us, just like that day.

Sure.

Clem McGregor: But I will tell you about another opportunity after we broke out from that Normandy experience there, we had an overnight moving and we were driving blackout. I don't know if you know anything about blackout . . .

I do.

Clem McGregor: But you just have two little lights you're watching and when they get to be one light, you're too close so you had to move back a little bit so the two lights would still see, and that night my driver got off too much and he was way off to the left. And I said, "Go back to

the right. You're too far to the left here." And he did. Well, we went on that night, and the next day Colonel Munson wanted to go back, for some reason he had to go back over the same route we've been. And he asked me to go with him so we'd have the communications set up and I did. Well, the next day being in the daytime, I observed that mountain road that we'd been over, and there was just one place like I found on that mountain that you could have been off as far as we were that night and not fall off over the mountain edge. And if we would have fell off, there have been no telling how many others were following us that would have went right over. Anyway, that was another one of those places where I could see God was taking care of me, and I later thanked him for it many times.

Sure, absolutely. After the invasion, how long was it before you were able to get a letter back home letting everyone know you're okay?

Clem McGregor: Oh, I guess I was communicating pretty good then. I don't think it was any distance, was it? You remember?

Mrs. McGregor: I don't remember that it was unduly . . . It was always a long time to me.

Sure.

Mrs. McGregor: Another thing that the families of those in the war, every day we almost dreaded going to the mailbox, every day.

For fear you'd have a telegram?

Mrs. McGregor: Oh, yes, from the War Department.

And the landing at Normandy was big news after it occurred, right? It probably had to be a while before you heard from him? Were you kind of . . . Did you kind of speculate that he might have been part of the landing?

Mrs. McGregor: Oh yes, I think we knew because they had been . . . Obviously we had hints that they were getting ready. They knew they were getting ready for that. They didn't really have an awareness of exactly where but, yeah, when it came out in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, and who was the news announcer at night? The voice you never forget, what was his name?

I'm not sure. In Fort Worth or nationwide?

Mrs. McGregor: Nationwide.

Edward R. Murrow perhaps?

Mrs. McGregor: Yeah, that's what I'm thinking of, gave the news every . . . His voice was kind of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's.

Okay.

Mrs. McGregor: Synthetic voice, and that was another thing, the president's voice over the radio. We didn't have television, and we'd sit around kind of like the Walton family, and everybody glued to the radio for the news, the whole family. And the president's voice was, oh, my. What a comfort it was to hear that he was really in command, that he knew what he was

doing, was sure of what he was doing. I would have to say, I'm sorry to have to say it but I think everybody generally knows it, the truth, we don't have that today. And I just think what it would have been like during World War II to have been in the condition we're in today as a nation. But we all pulled together. I could add that. The whole nation, you know. They quit manufacturing cars. They quit making furniture, everything. All effort went into the war, and we were rationing. There was rationing, so we did without, even some things we like to eat.

Sure.

Mrs. McGregor: And the whole nation, we all felt it. We felt as one. The unity of this nation at that time.

Sure. So once you pushed on from the Normandy invasion, where does your unit go to then?

Clem McGregor: We made a big circle around Paris. I don't know how far it was but I imagine we were 25 miles south of Paris when we made that circle over to near Metz, Germany, and I have to sometimes kind of renew my memory about all those things but we spent quite a bit of time there in position, one position. And when the Battle of the Bulge started, when the Germans were pushing through trying to get ammunition, they were running low on everything I guess, and that was in Belgium and Luxembourg so we left our position. The 90th Infantry was pulled out and sent to help surround that area, so actually the artillery never did even, as far as I know, was used in that Battle of the Bulge but we did have to go into position. By the time we got there, they had just probably cut off, we had cut them off so they couldn't get back, and most of them, I guess, they weren't getting up very much then, the Germans, and most of them were annihilated just like in the . . . Going back to the landing. The German 7th Army didn't surrender so when we drove out of there, I could just see bodies after bodies loaded everywhere we looked. They hadn't had time to be done anything with, and the same thing was true when we were in Luxembourg and Belgium, and it was a horrible looking place. I didn't see anything beautiful about it then. So we pulled out of that position and then started going toward, across Germany.

At that point, did you have a pretty good feel that we were going to win the war? That the Germans were being pushed back?

Clem McGregor: Yeah, in fact, I guess I always had that feeling, that we were gonna win the war. I don't think I ever had any doubt in my mind that we were gonna win. So it was more so then, of course, and we were driving across Germany then. And I could share that, about the night that we were holed up in a schoolhouse. We often did that because we wanted communications. We had to keep communications going, and we'd stop the windows up so that we could have a little bit of light that wouldn't show, and that night I was in charge of this whole operation, and I would be put myself on guard at midnight when we would do that. And I'd go out and start the motors on the cars. Well, that night in that schoolhouse, was out there, started the motors and started to go back into the schoolhouse, and about three or four rounds of artillery came in, hit all around, blew holes in the side of the building and in the cars, and I was right in the middle of this courtyard and didn't get a scratch. But I was groggy from the concussion, and managed to go on, get back in the house, and, of course, that grogginess disappeared pretty quick. Didn't realize that it affected my hearing until years later. But that night that happened and I told everybody in the unit the next morning where I was standing when the artillery came

in. They said, “Oh, no. You wasn’t there. You wouldn’t be here if you’d been there.” But I knew where I was, and I knew that, again, God was taking care of me for a reason, for a purpose.

Was it German artillery that hit you or was it friendly artillery that was missing its target?

Clem McGregor: German artillery, yes.

Mrs. McGregor: You said the walls of the schoolhouse were how thick, Clem, because . . .

Clem McGregor: Oh, they were great. They must have been . . . I used to think they were three foot thick and they probably were. They were real thick walls.

Mrs. McGregor: If I could interject this right here. When he, I think as you surely know, you’ve been doing this, that most of the World War II vets came out of the Depression like him. They didn’t expect anything. It was an honor to serve the country, and I don’t think it even occurred to them if they had been injured in any way, to ask for help. It certainly didn’t to Clem. And it was their duty. So, when he finally, son-in-law, Vietnam vet who is deceased now, he encouraged Clem. “You need to apply. You know, your hearing.” He’d already bought several sets of hearing aids, and I know ’cause I just got a set, how expensive they are. And he told Clem, he said, “Well, my goodness. You need to apply.” And then, a next door neighbor, we had just bought the home where we are now about 10 years ago, and he’s a World War II vet. And his hearing had gotten really, really bad, and he went and applied and it was approved. I told Clem, “Clem, you need to go. You deserve it.” Well, that wasn’t a word they used, you know. But he finally said, “Okay.” I think it was mostly because of the coaching of the son-in-law. And he went, and, oh, they asked, you know in correspondence, “We need to see your medical papers.” We didn’t have any medical papers. That’s when they were . . . You just, the expense, you just told about. They were on the move and that was before the Battle of the Bulge, that’s where they were going. And he said, “I have no medical records. We were on the move.” And so finally, Clem thought of a friend, a Yankee that I also met, and saw him quite a bit, and he said, “Walter knows all about this.” A very detailed person. He said, “Walter and I were very close.” And I told him about every detail, and we had just read in the Tough Hombre paper that they still do after all these years, every three months we get it, and it tells about more news about the 90th, the men in the 90th division. And he had just read about Walter __, and rather than living in New York, he lived in Florida. His address was in the paper, and so I said, “You know, you ought to call Walter.” I just remembered what a detail person he was, and that he would believe every word that Clem said. You know there were people who were like that back then. And he did. He was able to get his telephone number, called him, and Walter just about passed out. He went into I guess something that probably happened to him from the war, and he couldn’t even talk. He was just paralyzed, and his wife got on the phone and she told Clem, she said, “He’s just, it’s an anxiety attack.” And she said, “But we’ll work with him,” you know. And she said, “Maybe we can help you.” And so she wrote a long letter back to talk to their adult children. “We’ve gotta help that GI get this help.” She said, “When they talked to dad, we can pull this off for him.” And, sure enough, they did. He sat down and wrote a detailed description of just what you’ve heard, and they sent it to Clem, Clem sent it in and they approved his disability. It was only approved 70 percent. So I thought that was a very interesting thing that they would take the word of another GI on something like that. And so it has really helped us because of the kind of work we’ve been in most of our lives. When he felt a call into the ministry, it was always vocational pastoral ministry. And the church is new. They call it today church planning. They didn’t have

enough money to put anything into the, what we used to call the annuity board, for his retirement, and so there wasn't hardly anything there for that. And this is the way the Lord has provided for us again, even though he didn't expect anything. This is miraculous really. But, always . . . And Walter is deceased now because they announced it in the paper. I thought, "Well, that was another God thing and this ministry."

Sure. Sir, tell us what the end of the war was like for your unit there in Europe.

Clem McGregor: Oh, the day that the war ended, German surrendered, we had just crossed into Czechoslovakia. We had drove all the way across Germany, and the Czechs put on quite a celebration that day. But then we pulled back because they set up a way of people getting out of the service, points.

Yeah, the point system.

Clem McGregor: And I had enough points to get discharged if I wanted to be out which I did, but because the war was still going . . .

In Asia, in the Pacific.

Clem McGregor: Yeah, so all the guys that didn't have any points were sent home first. So they beat us home a long ways, and by the time they got home, the war ended over there. So, anyway we had to wait until we had transportation, and it seemed like ages. That was the longest time I spent. But it wasn't that long but it just seemed long. We were in a holding position, keeping the Germans from moving, and just close to the Rhine River or . . . Maybe it wasn't the Rhine. What river? I think it was Rhine. We stayed there for a long time, and I did have some conversations with German people, the ones I could talk with a little bit, and enjoyed that. But as far as having something to do, it wasn't much to do.

Sure.

Clem McGregor: And we headed for southern France, and when we loaded on ships there, we went out through the channel and the Straits of Gibraltar, and headed toward home.

When did you get word to your wife and family that you were on your way home? Or did you have to not contact them until you did get home to the States?

Clem McGregor: It seemed like we had pretty good communications then. I guess they must have known pretty soon that we were on the way. I hadn't thought about that one.

Do you remember your homecoming? Do you remember his homecoming?

Mrs. McGregor: Oh, yes.

Tell us a little bit about what that day was like.

Clem McGregor: Well, I would tell you one thing about on our way home. We got into a storm before we hit land.

Out in the Atlantic?

Clem McGregor: Virginia, I think. And the ship had to . . . Because it was going up and down so fast, so high, like this, down, they had to turn into the storm so the water was coming over the side of the ship and that's why they turned into it and took another couple of days to get to land. But, a lot of . . . The floors were always slick every time we went to the mess hall because many people losing their appetite and seasick, you know. So it was just terrible for that matter but anyway, we got out of that. I remember reading the SOS on the signals that I had learned, and it said, "USS Blue Devil, welcome home."

That was the ship you were on?

Clem McGregor: Yeah, at Newport News, I believe, Virginia, or somewhere along that way.

Then I guess it was just a matter of time before you actually got discharged and got put on a train back home?

Clem McGregor: Yeah, it wasn't long. We came to San Antonio where I was discharged.

Mrs. McGregor: Well, we met in Abilene. I traveled with another soldier's wife from where we lived to Abilene, and I don't remember why we had to go via Abilene but you were there, and we came together from Abilene then here to San Antonio for him to be mustered out, he would say.

Do you meet him at the train depot there in Abilene, or was there some sort of welcome home event there aboard the base?

Mrs. McGregor: I believe it was at Camp Barkeley.

And so at that point, you'd been gone how many years?

Clem McGregor: In the service?

How long had you been gone since you all had seen each other? From when you had left Fort Dix until you got back home to see her?

Clem McGregor: It was probably . . .

Mrs. McGregor: It was about 19 months, I can tell you because our little son was 19 months old, so about that long. It seemed like an eternity to those of us who were waiting at home.

I'm sure it had to be a relief though to be home.

Clem McGregor: Yeah.

Mrs. McGregor: Oh, my, my, yes.

And then at that point, you get out of the Army, right? So you're done with the Army, and resume regular life?

Clem McGregor: Yeah, I was anxious, I was ready to get out. Some people made a career of it, of course, and others were ready to get out. That's what I felt like. The war was over. We thought with peace on earth from now on. But it changed a little bit, hadn't it?

How did you all end up coming to San Antonio? When did you finally move to San Antonio area?

Clem McGregor: Well, after we were in Waco. We went to Waco. I had an uncle that wanted me to come there and go in business with him, in the laundry business. So we went there and worked with him for a while, and then eventually after so many, a couple of years, wasn't it? That I worked in the laundry? And we decided that the business was just for one family and not two, so we had to decide which one was gonna buy the other one out. So he bought me, my part, and we went into something else. Eventually though, we in 1950s, early '50s, I began to feel the call to preach the word and began some study in that direction. And in 1957, we left Waco and went to California, northern California, Ukiah, to start church planning.

Mrs. McGregor: Well, that was the year that Dr. Courts Redford, Executive Secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote Home Missions U.S.A., and he just showed all over the U.S.A where there were places where there was no really lively evangelical work going on. So I began to correspond. Well, it was no small thing for him to announce to me that he felt to go into the ministry full time. And I thought, "I didn't marry a preacher." So I had my own adjustments to make, but, see, I'm from the old school that the wife should follow her husband. And so I still feel that way. But it was still an adjustment, a very big one. Because we were turning loose . . . Everything went right for us in Waco. Every move we made. We had a lovely home, had friends, lovely church, and our family was doing well. Our kids would have probably gone to Baylor. But anyway, it was the Lord's will that we do that, and we had been out there about 16 years or so, and I was worn out. Church planning, it would start with nothing, and had had two more sons, Greg who is middle 50s, lives in Orlando. Rick lives in New . . . What is that city north of Dallas?

There's a bunch of them.

Mrs. McGregor: I know there are.

Plano?

Mrs. McGregor: No, one of those . . . My goodness, what is it? Where does Rick live? I'm sorry, it's a memory lapse. But anyway, just on the north side of Dallas. So they're all scattered as a result of our life being like it has been. And two daughters on the west coast, and a daughter in Texas. I was tired. I was worn out. He wasn't. He was just content with things as they were but, well, I don't know that you know anything about that kind of background but you just do it all. And I was very involved. We were associational workers as well in California and Nevada, and, I said, well, I just kinda said, "This is it. I have to have a break." And so, we had heard and met Jack Taylor who had come to Carson City for these evangelistic conferences that we always have in January, and I had had a similar experience because of my coming to the end of myself out there, and I was interested in that being developed. That's where I was at the time, so I did kind of put my foot down, I guess. "This is what we gotta take care of right now." And so we came to San Antonio to be in Castle Hills First Baptist Church, and we intend to go back out there. It was in our heart to go back but he got involved with some Christian doctors. Some are still here in the church, and ministry to hard-core heroin addicts. That was the drug on the street here then. And when he did that, I took a job with the church, with the children which I had specialized in, supervising 19 preschool workers about five or six days a week. That's what was going on in this church. And one thing led to another. They moved him on to the jail ministry

full time. I thought, “Now that’s just something I cannot do.” Well, of course, that’s exactly the way I needed to feel because I can’t, but I learned. He really didn’t ask me to but he was willing to use me for him to do his work through me, and so, all of this has been quite a . . . The whole thing, beginning with this, it’s been a learning experience, and as Clem has mentioned I think two or three times, it’s all a part of our getting to know God better, the whole thing. So, we began to settle down in San Antonio, and we’ve been here now a little over 40 years.

And here you are. That’s great.

Mrs. McGregor: I’ve found this to be as much a mission field as anything we had run into out there.

Clem McGregor: Yeah. Well, God was preparing me for the jail ministry all that time. Wherever I pastored, I always went to the jail. No other pastor in town would be going to the jail but I felt led to go, and especially one place, the last place where we were in Lovelock, they didn’t have a jailer so I convinced the patrolman when he’d come around, he’d come in and look in on ’em about every four or five hours so I convinced him that I could just go in there and stay in the jail. He could lock me up and come back. When he came back around, I’d get out. So I had some good services in the jail that way. Wouldn’t be but maybe three, four, five men in there but that was starting my jail ministry, and when I got started here, I could see God had been preparing me for something bigger but I didn’t know it. He’s always getting us ready for the next step. We don’t know what it is.

Mrs. McGregor: So I guess we’ll just stay here.

That sounds good. Well, I want to thank both of you for letting us do this interview today. Like I said at the beginning, it’s an honor for our program. We have archives that go back to the 1700s. We have the original land grant that David Crockett’s widow received when he was killed at the Alamo, and we have the original registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of the settlers that came to Texas. So our goal is to save this interview for hundreds of years as well for future generations. With that in mind, is there anything you would want to say to somebody listening to this interview long after we’re all gone?

Clem McGregor: Well, I could say that I believe God is preparing us all the time for something better and bigger, and getting us ready for the exit. And right now it looks to me like we’re getting ready for the trumpet to sound, and it’s an emergency that we get as many people saved as possible today and every day. But all of us need to be living for the Lord today.

Mrs. McGregor: Well, I can see in looking back how those years were learning years. I would say probably it made us much more serious about life. It also grounded us in our marriage. People want to know, 72 years, “How do you do it?” I say, well, because of all the various experiences we’ve had in life beginning with . . .

Very young.

Mrs. McGregor: Yeah, trial of the Lord, right at the very beginning. That matured us, and we both . . . By the time he came home, we both knew we want a Christian home. We want to raise a Christian family, and that was a hard time. We’ve been through a lot of hard things in life but

always been learning times, just like the war years were. I said, “Life is good.” Our life has been good.

We'll close with that note. And, again, thank you very, very much for this interview today.